

Madison County Courthouse  
Courthouse Square  
Winterset  
Madison County  
Iowa

HABS No. IA-83

HABS  
IOWA,  
61-WINSE,  
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

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IOWA,  
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

MADISON COUNTY COURTHOUSE

HABS No. IA-83

Location: Courthouse Square, Winterset, Iowa

Present Owner: Madison County, Iowa

Present Occupant: Madison County offices and Madison County  
Historical Society

Present Use: Madison County Courthouse

Statement of Significance: The courthouse is sited in the middle of the town square, as is often found in this portion of the midwest. The building, however, is unusual in its stone construction and in the relatively simple interpretation of the classic-inspired version of the Victorian idiom. The architect was A. H. Piquenard, who with John C. Cochrane, was the architect of the state capitol in Des Moines.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Physical History

1. Dates of erection: 1876-1877 (2, pp. 5, 177).
2. Architect: Andrew H. Piquenard of Springfield, Illinois (2, pp. 21, 103).

Piquenard was born in France around 1825 and came to the United States in 1848 (10, p. 474; 4, I, p. 399).

According to Cyrenus Cole, Piquenard was a member of the French Icarian Society (5, p. 362). The Icarians were a

communistic, utopian society which settled in Nauvoo, Illinois in 1849. Some of them moved to the Saint Louis area in Missouri in 1856, and the rest left Nauvoo for Corning, Iowa, in 1860 (11, pp. 78, 79). Piquenard is known to have worked for a prominent Saint Louis architect, George I. Barnett, for many years (4, pp. 399, 474). John C. Cochrane won a competition in 1867 for the design of the Illinois state capitol, and some time within six months after his winning it, he and Piquenard formed a partnership that continued until Piquenard's death (10, p. 130). In 1870 Piquenard moved to Springfield, Illinois, because he was needed at the construction site of the capitol there (4, p. 399). In the same year the two men won an architectural competition for the design of the Iowa state capitol in Des Moines, and excavations for the building began late in the year (7, pp. 9, 10, 51).

Piquenard is said to have lived a "retired life", but through his books he kept in touch with architectural developments in Europe and the United States. In his obituary he is described as "a firm adherent to the French Renaissance style, in which he was educated." Considering that he was around twenty-five years of age when he came to the United States, his education was probably completed in France, but no specific information on this matter has been found. He was interested in and had investigated the manufacturing of plaster, artificial cements, and carton

pierre. The last was a pasteboard imitation of stone, and he had several artists using the imitation material (4, p. 399).

3. Original and subsequent owners: The courthouse square is public property and was the site of the previous courthouse for Madison County.
4. Builders, suppliers, etc.: As mentioned, the superintendent was employed by the county Board of Supervisors to erect the building, and he entered into contracts with suppliers of material, labor, or of both, some of whose names are given in the minutes of the Board of Supervisors and are listed below:

T. F. Mardis, some of the brick (2, p. 20)

Brooks, Wilson & Stein, engine for derrick (2, p. 39)

Getchell & Merrell, window frames (2, p. 48)

Union Foundry Works, iron beams, ironwork (2, pp. 48, 63)

McFarland & Price, cornice, material for covering dome (2, pp. 65, 78)

Carver & Young, furniture for offices and for courtroom, cornice for courtroom gallery, stairs, woodwork (2, pp. 117, 121, 140, 174)

John W. Norris, 5 sets of vault doors (2, p. 121)

F. M. Cassidy, bell (2, p. 122)

Cardiff Plaster Mills, stucco (2, p. 122)

Gratz & Tate, hardware (2, p. 122)

Haxton Steam Heating Co., pipe and steam-heating  
apparatus, registers (2, p. 140)

Burlington Manufacturing Co., marble (2, p. 156)

J. D. Seeberger, hardware (2, p. 163)

Combination Gas Machine Co., gas machine (2, p. 163)

Baker Arnold Co., gas fixtures (2, p. 163)

C. & S. Harbach, varnish and furniture (2, p. 174)

5. Original plans, construction, etc.: On 2 October 1875 the second Madison County Courthouse burned. The building was a total ruin (6, p. 62). A special county election was held in November 1875, and the voters approved construction of a new courthouse for \$100,000. They also approved the issuing of bonds to this amount, which was to be repaid through a five-mil property tax (1, p. 424). On 3 December 1875 the county Board of Supervisors accepted a proposal by A. H. Piquenard, placed his proposal on file with the auditor, and agreed to employ Piquenard as the architect of the courthouse to be erected (1, p. 427). The contract for his services was signed on that date (2, p. 103). It is of interest that the minutes of the Board of Supervisors contain no record of the formulation of a building program other than the fact that the new building was to cost \$100,000. Neither is there any record that proposals from other architects were sought or received. There is no indication why Piquenard was chosen without consideration of other architects or other proposals. The customary procedure

of the time would be to seek such proposals. It is possible, however, that Piquenard was sought out because he was known as the architect of the new state capitol in Des Moines. He was awarded that commission, with his partner John C. Cochrane, on 21 October 1870, and the building was still under construction in 1876 (7, p. 51).

By January 1876 the ruins of the burned courthouse had been taken down, except that vault walls were left standing in order to protect the foundation of the vaults. Materials that were thought to be reusable were stockpiled on the site -- some of the stone, iron, anchors and sash weights, doors and sash, and other items (2, p. 6).

On 7 January 1876 the county Board of Supervisors ordered the construction of the new courthouse and appointed W. H. Lewis as superintendent of construction. In this capacity he was to "have immediate control and direction of the construction of the courthouse under general direction of this Board according to plans and specifications adopted or to be adopted." He had the power to purchase the necessary material for the building and to contract in the name of the county to buy tools and to employ workmen and laborers. The Board could require him to report his doings at any time. Drawing an annual salary of \$2500, he began work on 15 January 1876 (2, pp. 14, 15). The superintendent was acting, in today's terms, in the combined role of the general con-

tractor and the superintendent and was the owner's paid agent. This procedure was customary at this time.

In November 1876 the architect died, thereby terminating the contract between him and the Madison County Board of Supervisors (2, p. 103). In April 1877 his widow was offered \$500 as payment in full for his services, which she accepted (2, p. 113). His total fee amounted to \$2,000 (2, p. 179). At this time, W. H. Lewis was authorized to procure further architectural services in order to complete the building, but he did not find it necessary. His final accounting of the construction costs lists total architectural fees as the same amount paid to Piquenard, thus verifying the extent of architectural services made use of (2, p. 103).

As difficulties were encountered, changes in plans were made. For example, it was planned to reuse much of the stone from the previous building, but this was not possible to the extent hoped for because the old stone "was quite roughly cut, the faces of the second story ashlar being only pointed off." Other defects were found. The upper story courses had been of random lengths of ashlar; fire had spoiled all of the window trimmings and much of the belt course and had badly cracked a large part of the portico. Much of the stone not burned was either not of regular size or "in wind", so recutting was required. In addition, the old stone was dirty and did not match the color of the new. For these reasons the

architect ordered recutting of all stone, thus increasing the cost slightly. Another reason for added cost was the fact that more stone was needed than had been estimated (2, p. 177). It had been assumed that the old basement walls would be satisfactory, but they were not, so all interior basement walls and some exterior basement walls had to be taken down (2, p. 178). Superintendent Lewis' final report of construction, submitted on 8 December 1877, gives the total cost of construction as \$117,813.43 (2, pp. 177, 179).

The building has three stories and a basement. On 15 November 1877 the Board of Supervisors decided on the locations of the various offices in the courthouse. The plan is an equal-armed cross, the axes of which lie north-south and east-west.

#### First floor

West wing: north room, County Treasurer  
                    south room, County Auditor  
South wing: west room, Sheriff  
                    east room, Clerk of the Courts  
East wing: south room, Janitor  
                    north room, County Recorder  
North wing: east room, County Superintendent  
                    west room, Board of Supervisors  
                    (changed, see below)

All rooms of the county officers have large, fireproof vaults (8, p. 395). On 6 December 1877 a contract for



rental of the west room of the north wing to the city of Winterset for the mayor's office was approved (2, p. 174).

In general, the first floor housed county offices and contained steel vaults. The second floor contained the courtroom at the center of the building and the south side, and apartments for judges and attorneys, the grand jury room, and several petit jury rooms. The courtroom opened into a large corridor on three sides. In the attic (third floor) were several unoccupied rooms (9, pp. 60, 61; 8, p. 392). In 1878 two of the attic rooms in the north wing were rented to the Winterset Guards (2, p. 240).

The Board of Supervisors ruled in December 1877 that the courtroom might also be used for religious, charitable, agricultural, political, or temperance meetings, if the cost of heat, light, and janitor were paid. However, public amusements, entertainments, or exhibitions in the courtroom were prohibited (2, p. 175).

6. Alterations and additions: In April 1878 McDonnell and Meora contracted to build a jail in the basement under the Auditor's Office -- that is, the west wing -- for \$875.00, and work was completed for inspection in August of the same year. With an extra partition and gate added, the cost rose to \$1,000.00 (2, pp. 221, 243).

At some later time, the jail has been made over into public rest rooms accessible from the exterior of the building.

Judging by appearances, the courtroom remodeling dates from some time in the 1960s. The room now has a suspended acoustical ceiling and walnut plywood walls. Aluminum window sash have replaced the original sash of the first and second stories of the building and an aluminum-and-glass vestibule has been installed just inside of each of the original large wooden entrance doors at the first floor. Some of the second-floor offices have been remodeled similar to the courtroom.

Historical Events Connected with the Structure

Not known.

Sources of Information

1. Important old views: The Madison County Historical Society, whose quarters are on the third floor of the courthouse today, has an early photograph of the present building and an interesting view, taken from the building in 1907, of the southwest corner of the square. In addition, the Historical Society has a photograph of the previous courthouse, which resembled the present one closely but was two stories high and had a lower tower. Davies contains an engraving of this earlier building also (6, frontispiece).

2. Bibliography:

Primary or unpublished sources.

(1) Minutes of the Board of Supervisors, Madison County, Iowa. 4 Jan. 1869 to 3 Jan. 1876. At Madison County Courthouse.

- (2) Same, 3 Jan. 1876 to 5 Sept. 1882. At same place.
- (3) Same, 1 Jan. 1883 to 7 Jan. 1889. At same place.
- Secondary or published sources.
- (4) American Architect and Building News. Vol. 1,  
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- (7) First Biennial Report of the Capitol Commissioners  
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- (8) History of Madison County, Iowa. Des Moines, 1872.
- (9) Mueller, Herman A., supervising editor, History of  
Madison County Iowa and Its People. Chicago, 1915.  
2 volumes.
- (10) Withey, Henry F. and Elsie Rathburn. Biographical  
Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased).  
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- (11) Benevolo, Leonardo. The Origins of Modern Town  
Planning. Cambridge, Mass., 1967.

#### ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

##### Description of Exterior

- 1. Foundations: tooled face ashlar, flush joints, capped  
with a watertable. The stone is an orange-beige color.

At the sides of the porches the stone has been cement-plastered and scored to resemble stone.

2. Wall construction: stone masonry bearing walls, rusticated at first floor with tooled surfaces within smooth margins. At the sill line of the second floor window there is a belt course of the same height and general form as the cornices on the four first-floor porches. The belt course and cornices form a continuous horizontal band. The walls above this band have rusticated quoins at the corners of the four projecting wings and flush-jointed ashlar surfaces otherwise. All stone matches that of the basement level.
3. Porches: Each of the four wings has a porch at the first floor level. The porch projects one bay and is three bays wide. On its length it has paired Tuscan columns, octagonal in cross section at the lower third and circular above. The pairs of columns support shallow segmental arches. Columns and entablature are stone, but the porch ceiling is wood, tongue and groove pattern, now painted gray.
4. Chimneys: There are chimneys at each corner of each of the four projecting arms of the cross-shaped plan.
5. Openings - doorways and doors: The exterior doorways are capped by stilted segmental arches supported by flanking pilasters the main element of whose capitals consists of what appears to be Greek triglyph. Arch and pilasters are in stone. The entrance doors are paired,

with glazed transom above. The upper lights of the doors are glazed. The doors and a portion of the depth of the reveal are of wood and are very thick and heavily molded.

6. Openings - windows: The first-floor windows are paired, and segmental arched. The column between pairs is stone and resembles the pilasters flanking the doorways. Second floor windows are grouped in pairs, except at the south wing where they are single and rise the full height of the courtroom within and are arched; those at the other wings are of the same overall size, but the upper, arched portion serves to light the third floor. Aluminum double hung sash have replaced the original sash at first and second floors.
7. Roof: The roof is gabled, of low pitch, and is covered with slates coated with asphalt. Over the outer portions of each pediment the roofing is sheet metal painted with aluminum paint.
8. Cornice, eaves: The cornice is of sheet metal work, painted gray. The cornice has a frieze of panels between suppressed brackets.
9. Cupola: This is the crowning feature of the building, now painted glaring aluminum. The cupola consists of three stages. The lowest is a tapering octagon on which the octagonal drum of the main stage rests, and this in turn is capped by a cloister-vault dome. The outer surface of all three stages is sheet metal, much of which is fashioned to imitate stone construction and which must

have been painted originally in the color of stone. The cupola is framed in iron. At the eight corners, within the metal cladding, are eight columns that are circular in cross section, about 8 3/4" in outside diameter, with four molding-like forms running the length of the columns are equally distributed on their circumference. The cupola framing is constructed of 5" I's, 2 1/4" x 2 1/4" T's, and 1 1/4" x 1 1/4" angles. Riveted and bolted connections are used.

#### Description of Interior

##### 1. Floor plans:

Cellar. The central portion of the cellar is generally open, following the cross-shape of the central corridors of the four first floor wings above.

First floor. Central corridor, cross-shaped. The east and west wings contain stairways running at the side of the corridor. Offices lie on each side of the corridor at the outer ends of each wing. Vaults are placed toward the inner portions of the building.

Second and third floor. The corridor goes from west to east with a jog to the north around the central space occupied by the courtroom.

Fourth floor (cupola). An enclosed stair leads here from the third-floor corridor.

Fifth floor (cupola). An iron stair rises to this level, which is in effect only a gallery around the outside of the cupola.

2. Stairways: The main stairways are of extremely heavy hardwood detailing with massive newells.
3. Flooring: In the main corridors of first and second floors this is black and white square marble tile, joints running at 45° to the walls. Much of the other flooring is hardwood.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster. Wherever the original ceiling is visible it is found to be segmental-arched vaulting. In the corridors the vaulting spans across the width of the space except where iron beams are used to frame the openings through which the stairways pass. Elsewhere, iron beams spaced about 5 feet on centers and the ceiling arches between the beams. In the cellar there is no plaster and brick vaulting is visible. Presumably this is the vaulting material elsewhere.
5. Doorways and doors: Interior doors are framed in wide hardwood moldings. At the first floor the door frames have "ears", as in Greek Revival work, but here they occur at both the door head and at the base of the door frame. Door reveals are paneled also. Doors are of four panel pattern with one rail at height of the door-knob two tall vertical panels above this rail and two smaller vertical panels below it. The door panels have raised panels within. In general, light and dark hardwoods alternate.
6. Special decorative features, trim and cabinet work: Window trim is similar to door trim, but is formed at

the top to resemble a classic pediment.

7. Notable hardware: Doorknobs and keyhole escutcheons are bronze and patterned.
8. Mechanical equipment: The boilers are in the cellar and the chimney rises through the building, visible in the cupola is a metal flue that is carried from the side of the cupola, bending with the dome, up and out the center of the dome. The heating radiators are composed clusters of pipes of round cross-section. At the external-angle corners thimbles for stove chimneys can be discerned where they have been plastered over. These thimbles gave access to the chimneys visible on the building exterior.

#### Site and Surroundings

1. General setting. The building stands in the center of the town square of Winterset and the downtown stores line the sides of the square, as is typical in many county seats in the state.
2. Historic landscape design. The usual shade trees line the street surrounding the square.
3. Outbuildings. None.

Prepared by Wesley I. Shank  
Iowa State University 1972

Edited for HABS by Druscilla J. Null